

Ezekiel 34:7-16 The Good Shepherd

by Thierry Richards

Ezekiel 34:7-16

⁷ "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

¹¹ "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy.  I will feed them in justice.

How should we go about achieving good leadership?

- 1) Amidst this COVID-19 crisis, we are all in a constant state of unease and concern. Everybody is expecting the same amount of work and result even though people are working remotely. Therefore, there are miscommunications, many changes, and unrealistic expectations. We need good leadership more than ever in our situation.
- 2) Some people may have been hurt because of leaders. It might've been a serious situation. It might've been from a pastor whom you've trusted, who should've cared for you but hurt and used you.
- 3) Every generation, culture, country, or any organization, even family have leaders that struggle with the temptation of self-centeredness. We all tend to become self-centered. And our leaders are no exception.

What is the good leadership? And how should we seek it?

Today, we will see 3 answers that is revealed from scripture.

First, be warned of self-centered leaders.

Second, we have to look to God for leadership.

Third, we must help leaders grow to depend on Jesus.

What is the good leadership? And how should we seek it?

First, be warned for self-centered leadership.

Context: Today, I would like to take a look at Ezekiel chapter 34. The book of Ezekiel was written by Ezekiel. He was a priest of Israel in the 6 century B.C. In B.C. 597, Israel was destroyed by the Babylonian Empire. Many Israelites were captured by Babylon. They were held captive in Babylon for 70 years. Babylon was located in current Baghdad, the Capital City of Iraq.

Ezekiel was also held captive but Ezekiel received God's words. He preached God's words to the Israelites held in Babylon. God's given word to Ezekiel was written and recorded in The Book. In 538 B.C., the Israelites were released from exile. They sought good leadership to rebuild Jerusalem.

To warn the people of Israel as well as give them hope, the book of Ezekiel was read. Chapter 33 was written about God's judgement to Israelites because of their sins. Chapter 34 to 48 was written about the hope of God. Today, I would like to read with you thoroughly about the warning and hope.

Please take a look at verse 7 and 8.

7 "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 8 As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep,"

God, who is the creator of the universe, spoke through Ezekiel. Ezekiel says, "**declares the Lord God.**"

These words were preached to the shepherds of Israel. Shepherds were a common job at the time. Shepherds were people who lead sheep. Therefore, a person who lead people were also called shepherds. God taught the leaders of Israel as shepherds.

8 As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep,"

Shepherds were the leaders of the nation. Therefore, God compared the people of Israel as sheep. Israelites robbed, captured, and became a prey of beast.

Indeed, while Ezekiel preaching to people, Israelites lost by Babylonian Empire and became captives.

But, Leaders of Israelites, shepherds have **fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep**, the leaders of Israelites just fed themselves. They were self-centered and did not care about the needs of people. Therefore, Israel went to ruins. Verse 9 and 10.

"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 10 Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them."

Therefore, shepherds were preying on the people of Israel so God rescued them and He saw the leaders as a enemy of God. God gave judgement and brought them down. Be warned of self-centered leadership.

Interpretation

Any era, year, culture, country, or any organization, even individual homes have leaders that are tempted to become self-centered. It is in our nature. Our leaders are no exception. God focused in Ezekiel about self-centered leadership in the house of God. The house of God is the present day church. Therefore, we must be careful about self-centered leadership in the church. Self-centered leadership might appear in the local church, various denominations, and ministry leaders. God warns us about the leader makes people prey rather than cares for them.

Example: Have you ever read the novel "Pride and Prejudice" written by Jane Austin? In this book, Mr. Collins, a pastor came to a luncheon. He always talked about himself. He looks humble but he was not. What Mr. Collins was looking for was respect and status. He is expecting to be a pastor of a higher position. Eventually, he looked humble to someone who has high status, but did not care about anyone lower than his status. His personality was ugly. Therefore, everyone was looking down on Christianity because of Mr. Collins.

Application:

Some people might get disappointed through this passage. This passage reveals how church leaders have self-centered tendencies. When I look at this passage as a leader of a church, I remembered a time when I watched out for myself but not care for people. When I look back at my past community group, set up team, worship team, kids ministry, I have some regrets. Also, someone will look back their family. You will remind yourself about self-centered tendency. Everyone has self-centered tendency which includes Pastors, team leaders. Therefore, let us repent our self-centered tendency to God. Ask forgiveness to God. We will be forgiven by Jesus.

2) How do you react when you listen to these passages? Some of them might get hurt because of the leaders. It might be a serious situation. It might be a pain if a pastor of the church who should care for you but hurts and use you.

In every time, there are self-centered leaders. We have to be aware of this fact. Even though you have respect for your teacher, let us not to forget their sinfulness. Please do not think the church is the perfect place. We have to aware teachers are also sinners.

Second, we have to look up for God's leadership

Please take a look at verse 11 and 12:

11 "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness."

The leaders of Israel did not do anything for people. They just fed themselves, but God searched them, cared for them as the Good shepherd. He will search people even through tough situations. Israelites were captured by Babylon, but also some of them were taken to Samaria, the north of Israel. Others were taken to Nineveh, northern Iraq in those days. They were scattered, but God found Israelites from anywhere and saved them. Let's look at verse 13 to 15.

13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God.

The leaders of Israel were self-centered and did not care for people. But God brought them to their own land. God fed them, and lay them down in good grazing land. Verse 16 says,

16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

God will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. He will feed them in Justice.

Interpretation

God promised Israelites for a solution, even though there were many bad shepherds. The Solution is God Himself pastoring people. God made this promise come true six hundred years later. Which

means 2000 years before for us. Jesus came to this world.

John 10:11 says **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** What is the solution for bad leadership? The solution is to stay under God's leadership. Jesus gave the words to disciples. What is today's church leadership? It means lead people based on only in the word of Jesus.

Peter who was a disciple of Jesus said in 1 Peter 5:1-4. **"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you;[b] not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."**

One of my friends joined a big company. He worked hard. But his boss put many pressure on him. It might be a basic way to lead people. He did not receive any encouragement. He only received criticism many times. It continues for 8 years. He was tired and lost passion for this job. He thought he was used by his boss. Then, he listened the words of Jesus and trusted Him. Jesus is different than his boss. Jesus encourages us, loves us and care for us.

We all need a leader, but what we need most is our great shepherd. The leadership of Jesus Christ. He is not self-centered. He loves us therefore; He gave His life for us. He is powerful and great in wisdom. Therefore, He is able to protect us and He guide us safely in the future. No one can lead us like Jesus.

Most leaders ask people to follow the leaders.

I recently studied about Miki Nakayama. She is the founder of Tenri-kyo. Japanese indigenous religion. She thought she was used to heal her son. Therefore, She thought herself as a god. Many people came to her to look for childbirth healing and wisdom. Some of them started to follow her. One of the follower's husband was a carpenter. He built a temple for her. Tenrikyo's object of faith is Miki Nakayama herself and her teaching. There are so many new religions established in Japan. Indeed, her followers have fellowship and they can receive the founder's wisdom, but she is not a creator. She does not have wisdom, power, and love like Almighty God. She cannot guide followers correctly. Her teachings might have some good points. But it is insufficient teaching. Therefore, her teaching leads people in the wrong way and destroys them.

Two weeks ago, I met many people and most of them are tired because of the Covid-19 situation. Remote work had been started. Other business meetings have been postponed. Stay home business sounds good, but they are expecting the same amount of work that used to do. Also, the difficulty of communication happened due to remote work. It is a tough situation. But they are looking for the word of God. When we read the Bible together, everyone received encouragement from the Great Shepherd.

Third, let us raise the leaders who depend on Jesus. Jesus had the same image as Ezekiel. When Jesus looked around the situation around Him. Matthew 9:35-36 says, **"35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."**

Jesus saw people who suffered under the leadership of Pharisees. He had mercy over people **because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** Let's take a look at Matthew 9:37-38.

"37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Jesus said to disciples which use the image of livestock instead of the image of pastures. Jesus used the image of workers in the field rather than shepherds. Jesus gave the answer to the situation of

harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. His answer is in verse 38: **“Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”** God is the God of harvest. Jesus asked to pray for new laborers and shepherds, which are leaders who teach and tell Gospel, the word of God. After that, Jesus did in Matthew 10:5-7, **“5 These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”**

Jesus sent them to the field for training. It was a short mission. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, God commanded to the disciples, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** Indeed, it is hard to see the next generation of church leaders in Japan. I am working with Mr. Harada. He spoke at many seminaries and denominations and individual churches. He did some research. There are not so many seminarians and leaders of the next generation in the church. If Jesus saw this situation, he might say, **“Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”** We also have to pray for the next generation of laborers into the harvest. Let us pray to Him. Also let us make leaders who depend on Jesus.

One of my friends turns 60 years old this year. He prays to God to use him to become a coach for the next generation. He is currently working and staying at a hotel with other colleagues due to the Covid-19 situation. He is reading the Bible with his colleagues who became Christians recently. He is able to share his weakness and forgiveness of sins and love, wisdom of Jesus to colleagues. Through this situation, he wants to build younger leaders. This Covid-19 situation might be good opportunity to grow Christian leaders.

May people hear the word “Grow Christian Leaders” which means we have to build leader like a Rev. Fukuda, Elders James Wright or Steve Sacks. It doesn't sound easy to us. Well, this is not what Jesus said. To build the next leadership is so important for the church of Christ. We are able to dedicate this project with our talents. We are able to pray for them. We are able to encourage them. We are able to encourage the leader of community groups, other teams which help the service. Grace City Church Tokyo supports seminary students. You can help community group's leader meeting and Grace Kids ministries. If you are familiar with education, you can talk about how to grow Church leadership.

To make new leaders is not always hard work. You can simply share the time with them. You can share about Jesus. You can learn through mature leaders in the church.

To make new leaders, it does not mean you must have skill or technique. We know individual skills are important, but what is essential is the leader's personality. If leaders became self-centered, this self-centered leadership leads to negative consequences. Leaders sometimes will be the wolf amongst the sheep. Leader's personality is so important. First, we have to depend on Jesus to make leaders who depend on Jesus. We might not be perfect, but we should confess our sins, receive His forgiveness of sins. Through the weakness, this is a good opportunity to learn more about leadership.

The great leadership is the leader who connects people to the great shepherd, Jesus Christ. Jesus completely loves us. He loves us because He gave His life for us. He is a powerful shepherd. He is able to protect everyone. He is always a leader for people's benefit. He cares more than us. If everyone hears His word and put trust in Jesus, he will become their shepherd. Jesus is able to answer our prayers and petitions. He knows everything about us. He is able to give His grace and forgiveness. He is always with us. He is a great shepherd.

Everyone, what is good leadership? And how should we seek it?

Today, 3 answers were revealed from the scriptures:

First, be warned for self-centered leadership.

Second, we have to look up for God's leadership

Third, let us raise the leaders who depend on Jesus.

Let us pray.